

# Pausing for Brinkley

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This is how to do David Brinkley: First, settle in your chair like an old dog that's seen every trick in the book. Raise your eyebrows and crack a half-smile. Then—in graceful, clipped tones—say something that makes everybody else sound pretentious, wordy and boring.

"When I was just coming out of college, everybody was doing David Brinkley imitations," said "Nightline's" Ted Koppel at Wednesday night's 10th-anniversary celebration of ABC's "This Week With David Brinkley."

"He was an influence on an entire generation of NBC correspondents," said ABC White House correspondent Brit Hume, who does—for the record—a very good Brinkley. "They. All. Talked. Like. Brinkley."

But no one does Brinkley quite like the 71-year-old *éminence grise* of the airwaves, who presides with Sam Donaldson and George Will over the most popular Sunday morning coffee klatch on television. Brinkley's style—wry, nonchalant, almost sardonic—has proved just the antidote to the pontificating of official Washington.

"My favorite part is trying to find something interesting out of very often uninteresting people," said Brinkley. "Sometimes we succeed, sometimes we don't. And some of our guests are *really* interesting. All you have to do is turn them on like a faucet and let them talk."

Many of those—you figure out which—were among the 400 politicians and media stars who streamed into the lavish reception hosted by ABC News President Rooney Arledge at Union Station: ABC's Donaldson, Koppel, Barbara Walters, Hugh Downs, Chris Wallace and Cokie Roberts; NBC's Andrea Mitchell with longtime beau Alan Greenspan; Sens. Lloyd Bentsen, Bob Dole, Paul Simon, Patrick Leahy, John Kerry and John Warner; HUD Secretary Jack Kemp and former CIA director William Webster; Saudi Ambassador Prince Bandar and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Colin Powell.

Brinkley, said Warner, "has one of the greatest depths of knowledge of anyone today—maybe with the exception of my partner here tonight." The recipient of that extravagant compliment was none other than Walters, which would seem to add to growing rumors of a double-W romance.

"He's just being kind," she said. "David has so much knowledge. . . . And he has more wit than any of us. He sees life with a raised eyebrow."

"He is a legend," said Wallace. "That's a phrase that gets thrown around, but he is. In a business where trends come and go, he was there virtually at the creation and he's been one of the great successes ever since."

"Brinkley's reputation is being able to cut to the quick in a way that's very witty," said Donaldson, who launched into his Brinkley imitation: "Tennessee. Last night. At a church. Where they handled snakes. The preacher took up a seven-foot rattlesnake. He was 32."

Donaldson credits "This Week's" success to Brinkley and "chemistry." "Brinkley plays the role of the courteous father of the house. . . . George plays the role of philosopher king. . . . I play the role of the district attorney. . . . And it just all seems to work."

"You'd better know what you're talking about when you go there," said Prince Bandar. "Because between the aggressiveness of Sam Donaldson and the grandfatherly approach of David, they can take you apart easily."

But Wednesday night Donaldson was, in fact, almost charming, and the rest of the guests contented themselves with softer fare: the weather, golf, the joys of private life.

Webster, no longer provided an official car from the CIA, took his first Metro ride last week. "I made a trip to Chinatown with only one transfer," he said proudly, flashing his fare card. "It's beautiful and it's efficient. And if you're careful and read the instructions, you can't get in too much trouble."

Wait until Brinkley hears about this.

Note to Robert Gates. Read the instructions.

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43.